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Jane E. Kenway

Monash University, jane.kenway@monash.edu

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Commentary:
Cultivating a defiant global research imagination in international education

Jane Kenway, Monash University, Australia

Developing a 'defiant research imagination' (Kenway and Fahey, 2006) is necessary in all educational research. Do the papers in this special issue, individually and collectively, exhibit a 'defiant research imagination'? To what extent and how? I believe that a 'defiant research imagination' is necessary because of the untenable present conditions of knowledge production with their reductionist notions of the knowledge economy and national innovation (Kenway, Bullen & Fahey with Robb, 2006). The globalizing neo liberal university adopts the following primary and interrelated research imperatives: a techno-scientific orientation to knowledge, an emphasis on 'knowledge networks' for the explicit purpose of 'knowledge transfer' and on the commercialization and commodification of knowledge.

The corresponding implied researchers are the techno-scientist, the instrumental and strategic knowledge networker transferring apply-able knowledge to 'end users' and the knowledge entrepreneur who is skilled at branding and can readily turn knowledge into profit. We call this figure the 'technopreneur' (Kenway, Bullen, & Robb, 2004). It is intended that the deepest allegiances of technopreneurial researchers are to 'their' university. They are expected to be ruthlessly competitive in advancing its, often defensive and sometimes paranoid, agendas within neo liberal governments' policy and benchmark settings be they those of the nation state or international agencies such as the OECD (the two are usually agreeably 'harmonized'). This is regarded as the highest calling of any researcher or research group and attracts the greatest accolades. The field of international education is as subject to these imperatives as other fields and certainly attracts its fair share of technopreneurs.

In this context what possibilities exist for defiant research theories, practices and identities and how might such alternatives be conceptualized? In our opening chapter to *Globalising the Research Imagination*, Johannah Fahey and I (Eds, 2008) offer some pedagogical principals designed to assist PhD supervisors/advisors to support PhD students to develop a defiant research imagination. This argument is, of course, directed as much to supervisors themselves as to research students. Such an imagination is unavoidably global.

The pedagogical principles involved in cultivating a defiant global research imagination include seeking and provoking 'uncomfortable thought', examining 'unexamined habits of looking', trying 'to see from elsewhere' and 'striving for complexity'. These arise from our interviews with some of the English-speaking world's finest scholars on globalization who come from the fields of anthropology, sociology, geography and education. We complement their thinking with ideas on the imagination drawn from Greek-French thinker Cornelius Castoriadis, philosopher, economist, social critic and psychoanalyst (1984a, 1987, 1994a). In translating his ideas about the imagination into our discussion of the notion of a defiant global research imagination we develop an argument for a research imagination that is rich with critical, creative and ethical, individual and collective possibilities and responsibilities. Overall we contend that such an imagination should seek to unsettle the global hegemonic research imagination, noted above, and in relation to this would

also attend to what we call 'global geographies of power/knowledge' (Kenway and Fahey, 2008).

Attending to such geographies involves taking seriously the implications for knowledge and education of colonialism, imperialism and their 'post', 'neo' and recent manifestations; overall, to the geopolitics of the circumstances being researched and the geopolitics of knowledge itself. This means not only addressing past and present colonialism and imperialism as they are manifest in the particular situation under research scrutiny but also attending to *how we think* about the particular situation. In other words, what do they mean for our thought, for knowledge, for theory?

Taking these concepts seriously must provoke us to ask where does our thinking and theorizing come from and what are the implications of global geopolitics for the directions of knowledge flows and the rise and decline of particular knowledges *in situ*? In other words, how are knowledge, power, geography, temporality and mobility linked? To ask such questions is to put habitual practices of thought under pressure. It is to adopt a defiant rather than compliant research imagination.

Clearly those with a defiant global research imagination address such matters in a range of ways. These don't just focus on 'what constitutes my field?' but 'on what and whose grounds is my field constituted?' In a Bourdieusian sense, the important question is what are 'the rules of the game' in this particular field (Bourdieu 1993)? What's in and not, what's central and peripheral, what's canonical, and insurgent, timid and bold? What national, regional and global forces, connections, imaginations and people discipline its members, steer its contours, police, push or ignore its borders. How has this changed over time and space and in whose and what interests?

All such questions pertain to this special issue and, of course, to the relatively young research field of international education which is burgeoning, in part, due to the fact that internationalizing imperatives and activities in all education sectors are also burgeoning. But it is also growing because of its relationship to the many other fields with which it overlaps. These overlaps make it a very 'inter', and in some cases 'trans', methodological and theoretical research endeavor. The related fields have for some time included education and development and comparative education and, more recently, have included education and globalization studies and colonial and post colonial studies of education. From all of these, there are various off shoots related to policy, curriculum and pedagogy. There are assorted foci across formal and informal education sectors and settings and diverse institutions of governing including the nation state, international governmental agencies, nongovernment organizations and various combinations of these. And, of course all of this involves diverse audiences. Dolby and Rahman (2008) and Resnik (2012) provide useful discussions of this range.

At its best, the field of international education illustrates what the cultural theorist Homi Bhabha calls the 'interstitial' (2004: 3). An interstitial approach engages with 'in-between' areas of work, work that emerges in the 'interstices' between disciplines and fields of inquiry. By privileging cross-communication between these, interstitial inquiry destabilizes the positivistic claims that permit disciplines and fields to stake out their authority. It thus disturbs foundational certainties so that globalization can be more properly considered. More generally, this involves a defiance of certain established ways of determining the production and organization of knowledge and, in turn, this opens up opportunities for thinking about globalization in fresh ways.

Clearly then international education is an expansive and expanding field which is in the middle of many larger and smaller, longer and shorter narratives. The papers gathered here speak from and also seek to advance practices of thought and thought-full practices in this variegated space by offering 'new analytical threads and modes of inquiry' (Introduction). In particular they question some of the ontological/spatial assumptions and paradigms that have led the field of international education to concentrate on education across national borders and to use the nation state as the primary spatial unit of analysis. In contrast they insist that the field become more conscious of many spatialities, and connectivities including the global in the heart of home, so to speak, where, heterogeneity is becoming normalised and where our everyday lives and livelihoods are being reconstituted by the various inflections of globalisation.

The paper *The role of language in processes of internationalization* takes two fields to task provoking 'uncomfortable thought' in both. Byrd Clark, Haque, and Lamoureux argue that the field of international education has not properly attended to language. They point out that unless and until it does the manner in which it deals with the education of linguistically minoritarian populations will be totally inadequate. Equally though, they make it clear that certain current approaches to language education will not necessarily help. This is because they suffer from such problems as a limited spatial imagination (language as deficit or 'homogenous idealised skill') or from a technopreneurial orientation to language education (language as a 'labour-market-driven commodity'). The authors call upon language educators to learn from some recent directions in international education; those that stress the trans, the inter and the multiple.

One of the important lines of argument to bring forward here is Castoriadis's notion of ontologies and how he relates this to the imagination of the individual researcher, as well as to that of research collectives. As Curtis explains, he promotes ontologies in which 'being is not being determined' (Curtis 1997: xvii). He asks about the extent to which the imagination is determining or determined by dominant and dominating logics, such as those associated with the technopreneur.

This special issue certainly does not adopt the technopreneurial approach to international education that characterizes hegemonic contemporary practices in universities, schools and informal educational sites, those associated with the colonizing agendas of neo liberal economics and ideologies and with Northern/Western geographies of power/knowledge. Collectively the papers make clear that such practices are not only under researched and inadequately theorized but are ethically dangerous for subaltern groups of students, educational practitioners and locations around the world. None of the authors adopt a neoliberal understanding of globalization, although all explicitly or implicitly recognize that this is an immensely powerful force that must be understood *in situ*. Further, and because of this, none suffer from the ethical emptiness that arises when education and morality are subordinated to economics. All authors bring an ethical imagination to their inquiries as they explore the implications for education and knowledge of the manner in which different places and people are drawn into the relations of globalization in different ways and with different and vastly unequal consequences.

As a whole though, the collection is more ambivalent about what it calls 'liberal humanist' initiatives, those associated with such things as international partnerships, the work of NGOs, efforts at addressing the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals including attempts at such things as poverty reduction and gender equality. For example, while the paper called *Exploiting Globalization while being*

Exploited by it points to some of the hard truths about such soft power, the paper called *North-South International Education Partnerships* offers a more hesitant critique. That's said, all the papers make very clear the complicated on-the-ground tangles that such well-meaning endeavors often result in showing how complicated the resultant power dynamics are. Certainly they do not subscribe to what we have described as the 'On high and from afar thinking, deterministic logics and binary frameworks [that] limit current understandings of globalization' (Kenway and Fahey, 2008, 17).

Castoriadis's notion of ontologies also involves a social-historical mode of being with the potential to facilitate self-transformation beyond the self. Central to Castoriadis' political project is the advancement of autonomy, but as Gaonkar (2002: 8) points out, Castoriadis believes that 'one cannot strive for autonomy without striving simultaneously for the autonomy of others'. A defiant global research imagination seeks ways of being and knowing that speak to a project of socially instituting rather than instituted global research communities. It certainly does not blithely succumb to the reductionist and instrumental notion of knowledge networks that I mentioned earlier. Rather, such an imagination recognises that the research community is a 'social- historical world' that imagines itself into existence in a range of ways and places. A defiant research imagination is integral to the project of reimagining research communities in international education.

I see the beginnings of such a project in this special issue and not just in the multiple authoring of papers or in the nature of the research groups to which many of the authors belong. I see it in the authors' endeavors to build different global research communities which 'seriously consider the problems of the global everyday' and which study globalization 'from below' (Appaduri, 2001: 19). For instance, the educational practices discussed in *North-South International Education Partnerships* involve attempts to legitimate knowledge that arises from 'outside' the academy from groups who are usually excluded from research conversations. It talks of attempts to produce new grassroots knowledge formations that are also transnational and trans-sector. This paper clearly shows that international education must be about a great deal more than developing knowledge networks and effecting knowledge transfer. The notion of a research 'being' is being multiplied in the projects discussed. In this sense Varpalotai, Phillips and Roks make a point of trying 'to see from elsewhere'.

What lies beyond our sense of the self-evident? What might we come to know and be when we 'examine our unexamined habits of looking'? As the paper *Reconceiving International Education* makes clear, the pedagogies associated with international education are strongly influenced by congealed habits of history, location and biography and by habitual tropes such as intercultural learning and international understanding. Tarc, Mishra-Tarc, Ng-A-Fook, and Trilokekar seek to break such habits and to re-think international education pedagogy through novel notions of transcultural learning in 'trans-local sites'. These notions, they hope, have the potential to enhance understandings of the radical differences of everyone's global everyday and thus to promote more livable lives.

By drawing on what she learnt as a child about being 'foreign' and about being at home elsewhere, Mishra-Tarc draws attention to the psychic dimensions of travel and their implications for teaching and living abroad, working in worlds that are strangely foreign and familiar, that invoke recognition and bewilderment. Travel is affect — no doubt, but is it possible to develop some affective agency? She offers a delicious alternative to conventional preparatory history/culture classes for those who are about to travel. She calls this a 'post history' approach that 'acknowledges the

exhaustion of dominant Western methods of history for truth telling'. Ng-A-Fook's contribution illustrates the manner in which 'international education as community service learning' and 'social action' projects for student teachers can involve inquiring conversations that result in unexpected and very fertile reversals in knowledge flows. And, the section of the same paper authored by Trilokekar challenges some of the comfortable romantic narratives associated with 'study abroad' programs involving such things as international internships and practicum placements. She shows how the discomfort that they actually generate on matters of race and national identity, if critically and collectively engaged, has the potential to enrich students' understandings of self, of other and of power asymmetries in transnational spaces. As Castoriadis has argued, autonomy at the level of the social calls for a shared capacity to question social imaginary significations and to posit new forms. Its representations and institutions need to be 'reflexively interrogated and hermeneutically reappropriated' (Gaonkar 2002 8).

All the papers in one-way or another 'strive for complexity' and in so doing avoid some of the superficial 'cosmopolitan' surfing that too often characterizes research in international education. The case study method adopted in each paper helps to enable such some complex excavations. The paper that illustrates this particularly well is *Exploiting globalization while being exploited by it*. Niyozov and Dastambuev offer a remarkably nuanced account of the manner in which educational 'best practice' reform policies from elsewhere travel to and are translated within post-Soviet central Asia. As they astutely observe, 'Reforms are always borrowed selectively and implemented contextually'. This paper identifies the power maneuvers of international development and aid agencies and lending banks, former Soviet elites and 'implementing agencies'. Such maneuvers' highly contradictory consequences mean that international policies, often designed to support subaltern populations, become a means for this former elite to *reclaim* power in the newly independent states and repress these very populations. At the same time these maneuvers ensure new modes of dependency of the so-called newly independent state in the international arena. The irony here is that even though the new state appears to have swapped its dependency from the Soviet Union to the 'West', the national power brokers tend to remain the same. This might be described as a form of *neo colonial imperialism*, which operates through *internal parochial colonization*. Imperialism is still imperialism but expresses itself in new, more soft and subtle ways; through the use of 'sweet words'. No decolonization has actually occurred except to the extent that what were former socialist states have become current capitalist states which now deploy bitter words to denounce their preceding ruler's educational achievements and selectively deploy the language and educational practices of their new overlords.

A defiant global research imagination involves probing received notions and developing new ideas with the potential to confront and alter our unjust world on the move. In this sense this special issue represents a defiant global research imagination.

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Jane Kenway is a Professorial Fellow with the Australian Research Council, a Professor in the Education Faculty at Monash University and an elected Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences; Australia. She has won many prestigious grants for her research. Her research expertise is in socio-cultural studies of education in the context of wider social and cultural change. Her more recent jointly written book is *Consuming Children: Education-Advertising-Entertainment* (2001), and her more recent jointly edited book is *Globalising the Research Imagination* (2009). She has published numerous book chapters and articles in leading education and sociology journals. She leads the international team conducting the five year research project called *Elite independent schools in globalising circumstances: a multi-sited global ethnography*.